United Nations CEDAW/C/SR.1582

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
2 March 2018

Original: English

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Sixty-ninth session

Summary record of the 1582nd meeting*
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 27 February 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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* No summary records were issued for the 1580th and 1581st meetings.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined third and fourth periodic reports of Saudi Arabia (CEDAW/C/SAU/3-4; CEDAW/C/SAU/Q/3-4; CEDAW/C/SAU/Q/3-4/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Saudi Arabia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Alaiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that great progress had been made for women in Saudi Arabia. Under the current reign of King Salman bin Abdulaziz, Saudi Arabia aimed to realize the aspirations of its people. The country's ambitious Vision 2030 plan had been formulated with that aim in mind, and women had a crucial role to play in its implementation. Vision 2030 provided for programmes to promote and strengthen the protection of women's rights within a broader human rights framework.

3. The Government of Saudi Arabia had set in motion a series of reforms to empower women in a manner consistent with the country's religious principles and social values. There was a clear political commitment to the empowerment of Saudi women, and their access to economic opportunities was recognized throughout society. Saudi Arabia aimed to draw on international best practice to secure a better future for women and sought to preserve women's role in promoting the rights of minorities and vulnerable communities.

4. Saudi Arabia was committed to protecting human rights in line with the Islamic sharia. Indeed, the legislative and institutional framework reflected sharia-based principles and values, which included a duty to protect women's rights and dignity. The Basic Law of Governance established that the political system was based on equality and justice. The legal, judicial and socioeconomic sectors were structured so as to promote and strengthen the protection of women's rights, prohibit discrimination against them and ensure that they had access to the widest possible range of services.

5. In recent years, Saudi Arabia had taken numerous legislative, legal and administrative measures to give effect to the rights enshrined in the Convention. Various laws had been adopted to strengthen the human rights protection framework, and the enactments that concerned women's rights specifically included Royal Order No. A/121 of 4 June 2011, which was aimed at expanding the opportunities available to women, Supreme Order No. 27808 of 15 March 2017, which concerned domestic violence and violence against women, and Cabinet Decision No. 679 of 7 September 2017, which aimed to ensure that maintenance payments to divorced and separated women were received on time. Under Supreme Order No. 33322 of 18 April 2017, a woman no longer had to obtain her legal guardian's permission in order to access Government services. Royal Decree No. 25803 had been adopted in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Saudi Bar Association to guarantee legal aid for women and children who had suffered ill-treatment. In addition, the Mawaddah Women's Charity Society for the Reduction of Divorce had signed an agreement to provide legal and technical assistance to women victims of domestic violence. One of the objectives of the process of reform had been to eradicate unfair gender prejudices. Several campaigns had been launched to raise awareness of human rights and women's rights in particular.

6. With regard to the institutional framework, it was important to mention the establishment of personal status courts and the Council for Family Affairs. The Council had technical committees responsible for women's rights and ensured that the Government and civil society met their obligations in terms of the protection of women's rights. Women victims of domestic violence could call a dedicated 24-hour hotline. Its operators were all women. The Standing Committee for Combating Trafficking in Persons had been established and worked with relevant NGOs. Women enjoyed the right to vote and stand in municipal council elections. In addition, they could stand for election to a chamber of commerce or similar economic body.

7. The mortality rate for women in childbirth had fallen by 12 per cent. Female students and schoolchildren were provided with health protection, and women were

vaccinated against various infectious diseases and were given every opportunity to undergo organ transplants and other medical procedures when necessary.

8. A high proportion of young women attended university, and specialized programmes had been launched to promote education for women in general. Education was free of charge at all levels. Other steps had been taken to encourage women to continue their education to a high level. Girls could study the scientific and vocational subjects that were in demand in the labour market and could take physical education classes in certain public institutions. Cabinet Decision No. 60 of 17 October 2009 was aimed at expanding technical and vocational education for girls.

9. Numerous measures had been adopted to reduce the rate of unemployment among women. In cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Development and civil society, programmes had been launched to guarantee jobs for women who needed to work. Various other programmes, including a programme to support the children of women in employment and a transport programme for such women, had also been launched. Pursuant to a provision included in a 2010 ministerial decision and since incorporated into law, men and women were paid equal wages for work of equal value. Women's participation in the workforce had continued to increase, in particular in the education and health-care sectors.

10. Women's access to financial services, including credit, had been strengthened, and they played an increasingly prominent role in business, investment and capital management. Saudi women occupied important positions in the private sector. In addition, the current chair of the Saudi Stock Exchange was a woman, and women were represented on the boards of several corporations and banks.

11. The Government attached great importance to the Committee's concluding observations and general recommendations. The documents submitted to the Committee represented the outcomes of a transparent and objective process conducted with a view to enhancing the promotion and protection of women's rights. In 2015, a standing committee had been established to prepare the reports due for submission to the human rights treaty bodies. The standing committee played a role in the implementation of the recommendations made by the treaty bodies and worked in close cooperation with civil society. Saudi Arabia had also undertaken various activities to strengthen the memorandum of understanding for technical cooperation that it had concluded with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in 2012.

12. Pursuant to a recently issued royal decree, Tamader al-Rammah had been appointed Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Development. The appointment of a woman to such a prominent position reflected the political resolve to empower women.

13. In line with the approach set out in Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia was working to build a strong State, a vibrant society and a prosperous economy with the aim of promoting and protecting human rights, and women's rights in particular, to the fullest extent possible.

Articles 1 to 6

14. **Ms. Verges** said that the Committee welcomed the important efforts made by the State party to promote women's rights. However, it was unclear what steps had been taken to develop a clear legal definition of discrimination against women, as was required under the Convention, and what measures the State party had adopted in preparation for a withdrawal of its reservations to the Convention. One of the obstacles to women's empowerment was the fact that many of the legislative proposals put forward to empower women seemed to function as mere recommendations. She wished to know what steps had been taken to overcome that obstacle and, in particular, to ensure that the legal guardian system was abolished. In the light of the new approach adopted under Vision 2030, and with the aim of implementing Sustainable Development Goal 5, she wondered whether the time was right to open a public dialogue on the possibility of bringing some of the current, sharia-based provisions more into line with the reality of women's lives.

15. **Ms. Ameline** said that, given the considerable discretion available to judges in Saudi Arabia, it would be helpful if the delegation could provide information on the next steps planned in terms of the codification of law, in particular personal status law. On a separate

point, the Committee urged the State party to strengthen the mechanisms by which its legal framework was implemented. With regard to criminal procedure, she wished to know what measures would be taken to guarantee the right of defence and strengthen the role of defence lawyers. The Committee found it regrettable that the State party continued to apply the death penalty.

16. Despite the adoption of legislation on associations and foundations and the establishment of a centre for national dialogue, civil society organizations reportedly did not enjoy full freedom of expression and were subject to stringent approval procedures and monitoring. Drawing attention to the suffering of the civilian population in Yemen, particularly women and children, she asked what measures were being taken by the coalition to address international concerns regarding human rights violations in that country. In the context of efforts to foster a culture of human rights, she asked whether there were plans to grant the national Human Rights Commission a greater degree of independence.

17. **Mr. Alaiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Vision 2030 strategy aimed to promote the rights of women and to combat discrimination.

18. **Mr. Alotaibi** (Saudi Arabia) said that all forms of discrimination, including discrimination against women, were prohibited by law. Moreover, the Law on Protection from Abuse provided for severe punishments for violations of women's rights. A number of international instruments to prevent discrimination including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, had been incorporated into the domestic legal framework.

19. **Ms. Almoalimi** (Saudi Arabia) said that, as part of efforts to strengthen the national human rights framework, the Government was engaged in reviewing its domestic laws and practices, including those relating to personal status and labour, in order to align its legislation with the provisions of international human rights instruments to which it was a party. In that context, the Shura Council examined all laws and recommendations while the Human Rights Commission focused on human rights legislation, with a view to ensuring compliance with international instruments in the light of sharia law. In general, the Human Rights Commission worked to ensure the implementation of the various human rights instruments, including the Convention, to which Saudi Arabia was a party and to draw attention to violations. As part of measures to prevent discrimination against women, the provisions of Supreme Order No. 33322 of 18 April 2017 stipulated that government bodies should refrain from requesting a woman to obtain her guardian's permission to access various services.

20. **Ms. Alghamdi** (Saudi Arabia) said that no laws specifically stipulated the need for a male guardian and women were able to access a range of health, legal and administrative services, without the need for male authorization.

21. **Mr. Shayr** (Saudi Arabia) said that sharia provisions addressed all family and civil status matters. The Supreme Court was responsible for establishing general judicial principles, including on civil status. The Supreme Judicial Council issued instructions regulating relevant legal matters.

22. **Mr. Alaiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that specific provisions had been adopted to ensure the independence of the national Human Rights Commission.

23. **Mr. Alsalamah** (Saudi Arabia) said that, under article 47 of the Basic Law of Governance, all citizens and residents had equal access to justice. Directives on positive discrimination had also been issued to facilitate women's access to justice, including with regard to divorce proceedings. Measures had also been introduced to expedite civil status cases, which were often dealt with in a single hearing. Furthermore, marriage documents were issued to both spouses. Legal aid was available, including through a charity association working to prevent divorce, and legal aid clinics had been established in major cities. More than 50,000 people had benefited from free legal aid services. A royal order on domestic violence issued in 2017 contained directives relating to reviewing and amending relevant legislation, prevention efforts and capacity-building measures.

24. **Mr. Shayr** (Saudi Arabia) said that a judicial training centre had been established under the aegis of the Ministry of Justice and a memorandum of understanding for technical

cooperation concluded with the OHCHR. In that context, workshops had been held in 2016 in Geneva on international fair trial standards. Other workshops had also been held to raise awareness of international human rights instruments, including the Convention.

25. **Ms. Alturki** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Government was engaged in efforts to foster an enabling environment for civil society organizations, including through government funding. Measures had also been taken to simplify the process for establishing such organizations.

26. **Ms. Alajmi** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Civil Associations and Organizations Law set out procedures for establishing civil society organizations and sought to guarantee their independence.

27. **Mr. Alotaibi** (Saudi Arabia) said that military operations in Yemen were carried out in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. The coalition sought to protect civilians, particularly women and children, from human rights violations and attacks. Measures to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law and the law of armed conflict included mechanisms to accurately determine legitimate military targets, in order to prevent collateral damage, and the circulation of regularly updated lists of prohibited targets, including places of worship and the offices of international organizations. Moreover, expert legal advice was obtained prior to launching attacks to ensure their legitimacy and compliance with international humanitarian law. In order to prevent civilian casualties and raise awareness, coalition forces also distributed leaflets to the civilian population.

28. **Mr. Alaiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Government regularly reviewed its commitments under the international instruments to which Saudi Arabia was a party, including the Convention. Its most recent review had established that, in practice, the State's reservation to article 2 had no influence on its compliance with the Convention. Turning to the issue of the State's reservation to article 9 (2) of the Convention, he indicated that domestic law allowed children to acquire the nationality of their father and that dual nationality was not permitted. Nevertheless, the children of Saudi women married to non-nationals were treated equally with regard to access to health, education and other services.

29. **Ms. Verges** asked whether the Government planned to introduce specific legislation on the elimination of discrimination against women. She said that further details of the implementation of the recent royal order on guardianship would be helpful and, in that context, asked whether measures had been taken to define the areas where the consent of a guardian was required. She would also be interested to know whether the order was being implemented in the private sector. She drew attention to the need to incorporate a definition of discrimination into the domestic legal framework. Was the Government planning to examine sharia provisions relating to women's rights with a view to ensuring that they responded to contemporary circumstances and needs?

30. **Ms. Manalo** said that it would be helpful to know whether the Human Rights Commission had a committee on women's rights in order to ensure the effective coordination of policies relating to women. She urged the State party to incorporate the definition of discrimination contained in article 1 of the Convention into its domestic legal framework and to introduce specific legislation on gender equality. She hoped that the country's move towards a moderate version of Islam would lead to increased respect for women's freedom of choice.

31. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that she welcomed the initiative to establish the King Salman Complex to review the traditions of the Prophet and asked whether women scholars would be involved in its work. She would be interested to know whether religious studies graduates were recruited by courts that handled civil status cases and whether there were women Islamic scholars in the country.

32. **Ms. Ameline** said that the legislative reform the State party planned to introduce provided an excellent opportunity to harmonize its domestic law with the provisions of the Convention. With regard to the situation in Yemen, she urged the Government to contribute

to the work of the commission of inquiry in order to save the lives of millions of women and children.

33. **Ms. Alghamdi** (Saudi Arabia) said that a committee on women and children had recently been established within the national Human Rights Commission. Although it was engaged in work on a range of issues, its specific focus was on the rights of women, children and the family. The provisions on guardianship applied to both private and public institutions. The Government was taking measures to follow up on the royal order and to ensure its implementation.

34. **Ms. Altuwaigri** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Council for Family Affairs had been created in 2014 and began functioning in 2017. Technical committees would be established under the Council, including a committee for women's rights.

35. **Mr. Alaiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that women were free to participate and hold decision-making positions in the Shura Council and other government bodies. Women served on the Council of Senior Scholars and there were women who specialized in religious jurisprudence.

36. **Ms. Almoalimi** (Saudi Arabia) said that women were not forced into any career, profession or relationship.

37. **Ms. Ameline** said that, given the potential for confusion as a result of the large number of committees that would be set up as part of Vision 2030 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, she wondered how the two plans would be coordinated and how women would be incorporated into the decision-making processes at the national level. She would like further details of the role that would be played by the women's committee referred to earlier in achieving the goals set out under the plans. In view of the State party's centralized system of government, an overview of the mechanisms to enable segments of the population, particularly minorities, to benefit from economic growth, and an outline of the training provided to civil servants and the police to promote an inclusive approach to their work, would be helpful. She wished to know whether the Government had a mechanism for gathering statistics. She would appreciate the delegation's comments on reports that the country was planning to develop industrial cities exclusively for women workers. She wished to know what sort of mechanisms the State party envisaged for discussing the Committee's concluding observations with civil society and the wider public.

38. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that the State party had successfully implemented certain temporary special measures, including a 20 per cent quota for women on the Shura Council. However, she was concerned about the slow progress made in increasing women's participation in public and political life, especially in government, the judiciary, the diplomatic service, the private sector and academia. She invited the delegation to indicate whether the State party planned to adopt additional temporary special measures to boost the role of women in those areas. The delegation might also wish to comment on any goals and plans in terms of applying temporary special measures and achieving de facto gender equality in other social and economic areas.

39. **Ms. Alsaleh** (Saudi Arabia) said that judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officials took part in regular workshops, seminars and training courses to raise awareness of the Convention and human rights in general, partly under the memorandum of understanding between the State party and OHCHR. Schools taught women's rights to children from a young age up to university level. The country celebrated International Women's Day on 8 March and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November each year to raise awareness of women's rights and of the legal remedies available for rights violations.

40. **Ms. Altuwaigri** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Council for Family Affairs, which comprised representatives from 10 government ministries, 50 per cent of whom were women, aimed to coordinate efforts to safeguard family rights. Its technical committee on women had held a number of workshops to discuss women's issues and review laws concerning women and a new strategy for women. The Council supervised the first monitoring centre for women's participation in the country's economic development.

41. **Ms. Almoalimi** (Saudi Arabia) said that everyone was entitled to participate in political and public life, regardless of gender. Although the female members of the Shura Council and the Human Rights Commission had been appointed rather than elected, women had been voted in for the first time at municipal council level, winning 21 seats. The number of women in the judiciary had also risen. Since Saudi law provided for equality between men and women, appointments to public positions were based on skills and merit rather than gender.

42. **Mr. Alaiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that there were greater opportunities for women to enter the security profession, including the police, and visa and passport services.

43. **Ms. Alshangiti** (Saudi Arabia) said that the General Authority for Statistics had been set up in 2015, in association with the Ministry of the Economy and Planning. It gathered statistics for assessing plans and programmes and had established indexes and indicators based on international standards.

44. **Mr. Alaiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that other statistics bodies had also been created to gather data and assist in the attainment of the Vision 2030 goals.

45. **Ms. Acar** said that, while the laws on domestic violence and protection from abuse were positive steps, the Committee would appreciate additional information on the impact of such laws. She called on the State party to implement a comprehensive legal framework rather than simply introducing legislation piecemeal.

46. She wished to hear more about the extent of violence against women and domestic violence in the country. In that regard, clear and comprehensive data of the number of complaints submitted to the courts, including data on victims, perpetrators and their relationships to one another, would be useful in highlighting shortcomings and revealing any impunity. Given that attempts by State authorities, police or social workers resulted in a range of problems, she wondered how many reported cases of violence against women had ended in reconciliation without going before the courts. Specific information on the support provided to women victims in accessing justice in cases of domestic, sexual or other forms of violence would be appreciated.

47. She wished to know whether victims of violence against women were expected to seek help from the hotline for victims of trafficking or whether there were alternative services in place. Data concerning the number of domestic violence victims who called that line would be appreciated. She also wished to know whether police and medical staff in hospitals received training to recognize signs of violence against women and respond effectively to provide support and prevent a deterioration of such cases. She wondered whether specific medical and crisis centres existed where victims of domestic or sexual violence could seek special assistance and treatment.

48. She would be grateful if the delegation could clarify whether judges received training on the Convention on an ongoing or one-off basis. It would be helpful to know whether the State party had conducted an impact analysis of the awareness-raising activities mentioned in the State party report. She was concerned that the Government was reticent about raising awareness of women's human rights in particular, given that the State party report and responses had frequently made references to women's rights as part of human rights in general. Information on public outreach concerning women's rights beyond the two days per year mentioned by the delegation would be helpful.

49. It was not clear whether there were shelters for women victims of violence in the country and, if so, where they were located. The State party report had mentioned a number of Government initiatives that had involved all stakeholders. She asked whether those stakeholders included women's NGOs, especially in the provision of services for victims of all forms of violence against women.

50. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that, although a 2013 law protecting women from abuse was welcome, she was concerned that the lack of a penal code created difficulties in enforcing that law. Moreover, the law did not cover economic violence, such as preventing women from seeking education and employment, or marital rape. The offence of rape itself was not specifically defined or prohibited either; the State party had merely claimed in its replies to the list of issues that it constituted an assault on honour and was thus classified as

a criminal offence under sharia law. That definition was not in line with international human rights standards. She wished to know whether the State party intended to specifically criminalize rape, including marital rape. Use of the concept of honour posed the danger that victims might face punishment for allegedly having engaged in sexual relations outside marriage. The State party's response, that no such cases had been recorded during the period under review, contradicted publicly available information from reliable investigative sources. She wondered whether any progress had been made concerning draft legislation on harassment. Notwithstanding the availability of services for female victims of domestic violence, State officials often forcibly returned such women to their attackers who were deemed to be their guardians. Victims might then face charges and punishments for disobedience. She invited the delegation to comment on such cases. The delegation might wish to comment on any criminal proceedings, trials and convictions with respect to the more than 8,000 cases of physical and psychological abuse in 2015 acknowledged by the Ministry of Labour and Social Development.

51. **Ms. Almuneef** (Saudi Arabia) said that the issue of gender-based violence affected the entire world, and Saudi Arabia was no exception. The law against abuse covered all forms of violence against women and provided for a mechanism for reporting cases. Witnesses of violent incidents had to report them. A rapid response unit, staffed around the clock by women, received complaints regarding violence and abuse via a telephone helpline and passed them on to the authorities where necessary. Police stations and other security agencies also responded promptly to protect women victims of domestic violence. The law also had established 53 centres to protect and provide treatment to female victims of violence. The National Family Safety Programme also offered protection from domestic violence and established a database that stored information relating to domestic violence cases.

52. **Mr. Almajled** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution had investigated and brought charges in many cases following complaints made by women victims of violence. For example, in 2017, perpetrators in around 1,000 cases of violence against women had been charged and court proceedings initiated under the Law on Protection from Abuse. Of those cases, almost 350 had involved physical violence. In addition, 59 cases of domestic violence and 65 of sexual abuse had also been referred to the courts.

53. **Ms. Alghamdi** (Saudi Arabia) said that family reconciliation was by no means the only recourse in Saudi Arabia. In fact, certain legal safeguards were contained in several pieces of legislation, including the Child Protection Law, that empowered the Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution to launch proceedings of its own volition and provided that the various services involved could monitor the situation to prevent a recurrence of the violence. In that regard, all public officials and private-sector employees had a responsibility to report any abuse witnessed to the authorities.

54. **Ms. Alsaleh** (Saudi Arabia) said that various government agencies, including the Ministry of Culture and Information and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Call and Guidance were involved in efforts to eliminate negative gender stereotypes and correct misperceptions that could lead to discrimination against women. Awareness-raising through the media and social networks had been conducted to address those issues and inform the public about women's rights.

55. **Ms. Almoajimi** (Saudi Arabia), referring to paragraph 14 of the replies to the list of issues, said that training on and dissemination of human-rights-related information had resulted in greater familiarity with and knowledge of the Convention among the judiciary, prosecutors, law enforcement, civil society and individuals. Such training was evaluated from a qualitative and quantitative perspective. For example, there had been a notable rise in the number of women enrolling in higher education and a significant fall in the proportion of women student dropouts.

56. Turning to the issue of marital rape, she said that the foundation of all marriages was mercy and compassion. Any violation of that principle gave the injured party the right to terminate the marriage contract. Several means of redress were available in that regard.

57. **Ms. Bethel**, while commending the adoption of legislation to combat trafficking in persons, the development of a related national plan and the implementation of an education and awareness-raising programme for public officials, said she was nevertheless concerned that further work was needed to ensure the proper implementation of the legislation and related plans and policies. Regarding preventive measures, she wished to know whether education and awareness-raising programmes for the general public and civil servants were conducted continuously, whether they incorporated human-rights-based approaches and gender perspectives, whether impact assessments had been carried out and, if so, what their results had been. In a similar vein, she wondered what training was provided to law enforcement officials and border officials to enable them to identify and respond to victims of trafficking. She would also like to know what action had been taken to collect and monitor data on trafficking victims disaggregated by age, nationality, gender and type of trafficking offence, and which institution was responsible for doing so. She was concerned that women victims of trafficking were vulnerable to prosecution for offences they had been forced to commit. She would be interested to know whether there were plans to grant immunity to women victims in order to encourage them to file complaints and seek protection. Lastly, regarding prosecution of trafficking offences, she asked what support was provided to women victims who came forward with complaints. Information on the number of cases of trafficking that had been investigated and prosecuted, including the number of convictions and the sentences handed down, should also be provided.

58. **Ms. Gabr** said that she wished to know how the State party ensured, monitored and followed up on implementation of the regulations on domestic workers that had been introduced in 2013 and whether there were plans to incorporate those regulations into the law so as to improve their application. She wondered whether mechanisms such as hotlines were in place to enable domestic workers to file complaints of abuse, how many complaints had been lodged and what had been their outcomes, what legal and social support was provided to victims, including whether they could seek safety in shelters, and whether domestic workers could transfer to other employers in cases of abuse or unpaid wages. She also wondered whether social and other media were being utilized to raise awareness of the rights of domestic workers and the severity of penalties that could be imposed in cases of abuse.

59. The Committee was concerned that abused domestic workers were forced to flee their employers, leaving them prey to persons who exploited them for the purposes of prostitution. She asked what measures were in place to deter such persons and whether the country's trafficking laws could be applied extraterritorially to combat foreign networks trafficking women to or from the State party for the purpose of prostitution.

60. **Ms. Fatani** (Saudi Arabia) said that perpetrators of trafficking offences faced the full force of the law, as demonstrated by the fact that many perpetrators had been prosecuted, convicted and sentenced. Detailed information on the definition of trafficking and the application of the Trafficking in Persons Act were summarized in paragraph 53 of her country's replies to the list of issues. The country's Human Rights Commission had received 475 complaints involving trafficking from 2012 to 2017. Various mechanisms were in place to combat human trafficking and protect victims from revictimization. All competent authorities, including the Ministry of Health, were involved in follow-up measures and data collection. The National Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons, which comprised representatives of civil society and government agencies, was responsible for providing victims with comprehensive support and shelter, arranging for non-Saudi victims to be returned to their home countries and ensuring that law enforcement officials received appropriate training. In that regard, human rights training, including on trafficking in persons, was provided to judges, prosecutors, social workers and other public officials on a continuous basis, in partnership with OHCHR. Efforts were also made to learn from the experience of other countries. For example, a symposium had been held in 2017 attended by foreign experts to discuss best practices in combating human trafficking.

61. **Mr. Alaiban** (Saudi Arabia) added that various measures were taken to ensure that employers did not shirk their responsibilities under the regulations on domestic workers, which had effectively replaced the *kafaah*, or sponsorship, system, and to raise awareness among migrant domestic workers of their rights. Employers were, for example, obliged to

open bank accounts on their workers' behalf, which were monitored by the State to ensure that monthly wages were paid in a timely manner.

62. **Ms. Acar** said that she would appreciate comprehensive data specifically on the number of prosecutions, convictions and sentences handed down in relation to cases of domestic violence and violence against women. She asked whether the data contained information on the victim, the perpetrator and their relationship.

63. **Ms. Gabr**, while welcoming the data provided on trafficking in persons, said that her interest lay in the number of cases involving abuse of domestic workers. The requirement for employers to open bank accounts on behalf of domestic workers was a good initiative and she would be interested to know what other practical measures were being taken to remove the remnants of the previous *kafalah* system.

64. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said she would appreciate it if the delegation could comment on reports that women victims of trafficking were prosecuted for offences committed as a result of their being trafficked and that women in the State party were obliged to comply with a compulsory dress code, which required them to wear a hijab or other head covering when in public places or face a penalty.

65. **Ms. Bethel**, referring to the 475 trafficking cases that had been sent to the courts since 2012, said that she would be interested to know how many of those cases had resulted in convictions and the sentences that had been handed down.

66. **Mr. Almdimegh** (Saudi Arabia) said that, in 2016, a call centre set up for the purpose had received around 11,000 complaints of domestic violence. In 2017, 15,000 complaints had been recorded.

67. **Ms. Altuwaigri** (Saudi Arabia) said that concerted efforts had been made to enhance the rights of migrant women domestic workers. Recruitment agencies were vetted and the procedure used to recruit women from abroad was monitored. With the phasing out of the *kafalah* system, the relationship between an employer and a domestic worker was now based on a contract of employment. Employers were required to abide by the relevant regulations, including with regard to payment of wages, and measures were in place to verify their compliance. Multilingual awareness-raising campaigns had been undertaken, with booklets and leaflets produced and disseminated to inform women domestic workers of the remedies available to them in the event that any of their rights were violated. Any complaints made were duly investigated and comprehensive assistance was provided, such as legal and translation services. If the domestic worker wished to return to her country of origin, the Government helped cover her expenses.

68. **Mr. Alaiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that a full review would be necessary before a decision could be made as to whether the regulations on domestic workers should be elevated to the status of a law. Domestic workers were provided with relevant information on their rights and reporting mechanisms from the outset. In the event of a dispute, the domestic worker could seek help by calling a dedicated hotline. If a domestic worker had been forced into prostitution, the relevant legislation was applied and related protective measures implemented, including the provision of medical care, shelter and other assistance. Victims were given the opportunity to seek a change of employer in Saudi Arabia or return to their home country.

69. **Ms. Fatani** (Saudi Arabia) said that trafficking victims were not criminalized unless they had committed a criminal offence in the country. Victims were informed of their rights in a language they understood and were entitled to be seen by a doctor. Medical and psychological services were provided and victims could be housed in shelters as necessary.

70. **Ms. Altwaijri** (Saudi Arabia) said that there was no imposition of any particular dress codes on women in Saudi Arabia. However, women should dress decently in public, taking into account the country's cultural and religious traditions. That said, it was a woman's choice entirely which form of head covering or hijab to wear, since it was a matter of religious observance that depended on her own cultural background. In that connection, a number of international instruments urged respect for the cultural diversity and specificities of each and every society.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.